

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
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EO 11652: NA
TAGS: PINT TH
SUBJECT: THAI POLITICAL PARTY SCENE

REF: BANGKOK 7974

1. SUMMARY: DEMOCRAT PARTY (DP) OFFICIALS MET APRIL 5 TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE OF SUCCESSOR TO FORMER PARTY LEADER SENI PRAMOT, AS PRINCIPAL PARTY LOYALISTS GATHERED TO MARK 32ND ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEMOCRAT PARTY. FORMER THAI NATION PARTY LEADER, CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN, DECLARED INTENTION NOT TO RUN IN PROPOSED GENERAL ELECTIONS AND EXPRESSED HOPE THAT PRESENT GOVERNMENT WILL REMAIN IN POWER FOR AT LEAST TWO MORE YEARS. END SUMMARY.

2. RECENT PRESS REPORTS INDICATE A CONTINUED STIRRING AMONG THAI POLITICIANS, ESPECIALLY DEMOCRATS, DESPITE LEGAL RESTRICTIONS ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY. ON APRIL 5 MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE DEMOCRAT PARTY MET SOCIALLY TO DISCUSS THE QUESTION OF WHO SHOULD BE NAMED TO SUCCEED FORMER PARTY LEADER SENI PRAMOT. LEADING CANDIDATES FOR THE PARTY'S TOP POSITION ARE FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER AND DEPUTY PARTY LEADER PHICHAIRATTAKUN, EX-PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL DAMRONG LATTHAPHIPHAT AND FORMER PARLIAMENTARY SPEAKER UTHAI
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PHIMCHAICHON (RETEL). JOCKEYING FOR PARTY LEADERSHIP IS EXPECTED TO CONTINUE WITHOUT A CLEAR RESOLUTION OF THE SUCCESSION ISSUE UNTIL THE GOVERNMENT PROMULGATES A POLITICAL PARTIES LAW AND SENI FORMALLY ACKNOWLEDGES HIS INTENT TO STEP DOWN AS PARTY LEADER.

3. ON APRIL 6 PHICHAIRATTAKUN HOSTED A RECEPTION TO MARK THE DEMOCRAT

PARTY'S 32ND ANNIVERSARY. THE REUNION ATTRACTED MORE THAN A HUNDRED PARTY LOYALISTS, INCLUDING DAMRONG, UTHAI, EX-DEPUTY PARTY LEADER CHUAN LIKPHAI, FORMER DP TREASURER LEK NANA, AND EX-FINANCE MINISTER AND DP ADVISER SAWET PIAMPHONGSAN. CONSPICUOUSLY ABSENT WAS SENI PRAMOT WHO, AT 74, IS NOT EXPECTED TO SEEK RENOMINATION AS PARTY LEADER WHEN POLITICAL ACTIVITY IS LEGALLY AUTHORIZED. ALSO ABSENT WERE THE SO-CALLED "BLACKLISTED" DEMOCRATS WHO WERE ACCUSED OF SABOTAGING THE PARTY DURING THE PARLIAMENTARY CRISIS OF OCTOBER, 1976, INCLUDING FORMER DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL SAMAK SUNTORAWET AND EX-DEPUTY PARTY LEADER THAMMANUN THIANGGOEN. DEMOCRATS DID NOT PUBLICLY MARK THEIR PARTY'S 1977 ANNIVERSARY, AND THIS YEAR'S REUNION, REPORTED WIDELY IN THE PRESS, IS YET ANOTHER INDICATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE POLITICAL CLIMATE HAS EASED SINCE LAST OCTOBER.

4. IN CONTRAST TO THE MANEUVERING AMONG KEY DEMOCRATS, THE FORMER THAI NATION PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN ANNOUNCED ON APRIL 5 THAT HE WOULD NOT BE A CANDIDATE IN THE PROPOSED GENERAL ELECTIONS. IMPLYING THAT THE TIMETABLE FOR ELECTIONS SHOULD BE DELAYED, CHATCHAI EXPRESSED HOPE THAT THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT WOULD REMAIN IN POWER FOR AT LEAST TWO OR THREE MORE YEARS TO GIVE IT SUFFICIENT TIME TO RESOLVE THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS.

5. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THERE IS WIDESPREAD AND GENERAL SUPPORT FOR THE RTG'S PROPOSAL TO HOLD ELECTIONS, CHATCHAI'S LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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REMARKS ARE ILLUSTRATIVE OF A SHARED SUSPICION AMONG SOME IN MILITARY AND BUSINESS CIRCLES THAT ELECTIONS COULD BLUNT THE PROGRESS MADE OVER THE PAST SIX MONTHS BY THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT.
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